«GLI EMIGRANTI DELL'IDEALE» *: MAY DAY AMONG ITALIAN WORKERS AND SOCIALISTS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

From the very beginning, May Day assumed a specific ideological connotation on the one hand and the characteristics of a social and socializing holiday on the other. For this dual aspect as well as for its specific historical context, May Day can be seen as one of the possible starting points from which to analyze the origins and the motivations behind some of the social attitudes and interpretations of the Italian immigrants to the United States. It can illuminate the significance that the very term «political» was to acquire for them over the course of time.

The roots of May Day are to be found in the impetus of the orgazising force acting within the American workers' movement from 1884 to 1886, precisely in the years during which the so-called «first great mass migration» of Italians to the United States was taking concrete form. It then became a celebration whose modes and meanings initially had no traditional references, unmindful of the culture of the nation of origin which, according to Hebert Gutman, was the great reservoir of resources to which the immigrants turned in their efforts to carve out a place for themselves within the reality of the land which now harbored them. In the early years it was a workers' manifestation which found in the traditions of the American workers' movement it origins and its times of preparation, and in the political tensions of that movement the reasons for its emptying of meaning and its subsequent re-utilization by some sectors of the American Left as

* «The Migrants of the Ideal» Title of the poem by S. Righi published in *Il Proletario*, May Ist., 1903.

a symbol of political and militant self-definition. In this very early period, the First of May was for the Italian immigrants to the United States an «American» holiday. News of the same holiday coming from the nation of origin could do little more than add an element of apprehension, provide aspects for comparison, supply examples and teachings.

Undoubtedly, the perception of this holiday underwent transformation in the period from the end of the 1980s to World War I, when it began increasingly to take on the connotation of «tradition» of the international workers' movement, assuming shades of meaning and forms that were transferred, adopted or even simply inherited from the nation of origin.

In the following pages — reflections on a research project barely begun — we have attempted to reconstruct the atmosphere that was forming around the May Day holiday in the Italian communities of the United States, to identify the American and ethnic forces that were urging different groups of Italian immigrants to participate in it, and the forms taken by this participation. We have also tried to identify the lines along which indepth research might be conducted, in the conviction that the formulation of a Weltanschaung, of a culture, does not take place merely through intellectual mediation, rational and well-organized. On the contrary, the contribution of contingent and subjective experience, of involvement, of emotion or in any case of elements that cannot be easily classified through linear, rational historical procedures, plays a significant role in this process. The study of how May Day was perceived, experienced and utilized by the Italian immigrants to the United States is one of the instruments for reconstructing the subjective reality of the Italian immigrant in relation to the range of social and political options offered him by the American environment, by the ethnic one and by the traditions of his nation of origin. Moreover, a study formulated in this manner contributes to identify the social and political contexts in which this holiday has become, to a greater or lesser degree, the heritage of the working classes.

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At the Origins of May Day: Ambiguous Loyalty, Contradictory Adhesion

On a fine day in September of 1882, ten thousand or so persons, some well-dressed, others ostentatiously attired in working clothes, marched through the heart of Manhattan. In the midst of this procession were musical bands and gaily painted carts, and great banners waved above it. The banners bore placards calling for laws to protect the social life of the workers, to shorten working hours for both laborers and shop-keepers, and warnings that the voting power of the workers, if united in pursuit of common goals, was a force to be reckoned with. The manifestation had been proposed by Peter McGuire, Secretary of the Woodworkers and Carpenters Brotherhood and co-founder with Samuel Gompers of the association of workers unions which was subsequently to become the American Federation of Labor (AFofL). McGuire was also a leading figure in the only Socialist Labor Party (S.L.P.) in existence at the time. The demonstration had been organized with the active collaboration of the Central Labor Union, a New York structure which coordinated the city's trade-unions. The workers paraded the neighborhoods where the greatest concentration of immigrants, Italian among them, existed. The march was followed by meetings, dancing and fireworks, with movement in the streets that continued for the entire evening [1].

That evening the perception of spare time to be dedicated to encounters and to the discussion of problems, expectations and precise claims to be made, to reminding oneself and others of the right to such expression, spread through the crowd. The celebration was in honor of labor. Attention was being called to the contributions that labor had made and was making to the greatness of a nation, and to the rights of labor deriving from the laws of that same nation. From that year on, in the streets, in Congress, in the worker organizations, a holiday dedicated to the workers began to be celebrated. Labor Day became an institution. If the State and Federal organizations were reluctant for some years to recognize this holiday, the workers' organizations never tired of repeating, year after year, every September, to the public that lined the streets to watch the parade, that the workers' themselves had the right to appropriate and to have

accepted a special day set aside to emphasize «the equality and dignity of labor». The songs that were sung, the speeches that were made on those occasions repeated the themes dear to the hearts of American workers at least since the days of Jackson: equity in the distribution of wealth, solidarity in claims, unity in the struggle, freedom to organize and brotherhood among workers [2].

What did the American press have to say about the participation of the various ethnic groups? What marks did these urban manifestations leave on the Italian immigrants in New York? What did the Italian press, including that of other American cities, have to say about it? Those who lived and/or worked in the places where the manifestation took place would not avoid perceiving, if not clearly understanding, what it was all about, thanks to the visual impact of the parade, as shown in drawings existing, among other places, in New York's Tamiment Library.

Through careful reconstruction of urban ethnic geography and of the exact route followed by the parade, in conjunction with investigation of the comments of the press, the effects of this experience on the immigrants' feelings, on their manner of perceiving the role and rights of labor within the social context, can be reconstructed.

While on one side the more socially conscious of the American workers were demanding that their work should be officially respected, on the other these same workers, once again at the proposal of Peter McGuire, who had been the inspiring force behind the September parade, had decided to mobilize to press the claim for an 8 hour working day, starting from May 1, 1886 [3]. In preparation for this important date, the major trade-union associations instigated, between 1884 and 1886, under the banner of the claim for shorter working hours, a campaign of propaganda and organization. The unions affiliated with the Knights of Labor, a national trade union open by statute to immigrants too, tried to involve the immigrants, among them the Italians, in the eight-hour working day movement, even without the approval of the upper hierarchy [4].

The Italian barbers and the «young» Italian barbers (a distinction which is maintained in the sources and which perhaps corresponds to the one made in other sectors between worker and apprentice), defended by the majority of American trade-unions of the period [5], organized mutual-aid societies in New York and Philadelphia under the patronage of the previously-mentioned Central Labor Union and of the Knights of Labor represented by Vittorio Maggi. They organized

general assemblies to which «Germans, Americans and French sent their representatives», requested enrollment in the CLU, and felt themselves strong enough to hope to obtain «a purely Italian district with the seal of the KofL»[6]. A similar impulse seemed to be spreading among the Italian tailors in New York, Philadelphia and Rhode Island[7]. News of associations of Italian glaziers, of pastry-cooks, of cobblers, always coordinated by the extremely active Maggi, filled the pages, in 1886, of the *Progresso Italo-Americano*, a newspaper recently established in New York[8]. At the same time, there was an increase in strikes among Italian day-laborers employed to lay tracks for the railway textile workers in New Jersey. In New York the proceeds from a performance organized by Italians at the Germania Assembly Room were devolved to the strikers of the South-East and to the Knights of Labor who had organized them[9]. These Italian workers were striking and organizing to obtain shorter working hours, higher wages to narrow the gap between their own wages and those of American workers in the same sector[10] and, as we have seen, to enter the organized American labor movement.

But the hopes and expectations of the Italians were to remain unfulfilled. The upper echelon of the Knights of Labor did not accept workers' groups organized along ethnic lines. In fact, after the well-known facts of May 1886 and the violent anti-labor, anti-socialist and anti-foreigner campaign that followed, they took their distance, at least officially, from the kind of claims-demanding methods that the eight-hours movement was undertaking[11] If then the Italians took part in some way in the movement that shook the United States between 1885 and 1886 — and the degree to which they participated should be investigated more deeply, with quantitative and geographic data — they undoubtedly emerged from the experience confused, disillusioned by the lack of collaboration of the American trade-union institutions and probably frightened by the violent repression that followed the strikes. Moreover, those who found themselves in the zones where the Knights of Labor still exerted an influence, had to confront the attitude assumed by this association in regard to the recurrence of May Day[12].

While the year 1886 left deep traces on the still uncertain, frail American workers' movement, it also stimulated its organizational and claims-demanding aims. The by now established AFofL decided, in fact, to insist on its demand for the 8-hour working day, but to change tactics. It established that each year only one workers' sec-

tor would strike for an indefinite period for the 8-hour day, while other sectors would participate in manifestations and make financial contributions to support the strikers. The demand for the 8-hour day was a pole attracting consistent and, acording to some American newspapers, dangerous associations of workers. Thus the union felt it necessary to convince society as a whole, the occasional and apparently neutral observers, the employers themselves, that the long-desired 8-hour working day was one of the rights that, from 1776 on, had formed the connecting tissue of American society. Accordingly, workers' manifestations in favor of the 8-hour day were organized to take place on George Washington's birthday, the 4th of July and on the 2nd of September of the same year, which in some States was already recognized as Labor Day. All of this was in preparation for the great manifestation to be held on the 1st of May, 1890, as agreed by the workers' associations from different countries meeting at the Congress 1889 of the International held in Paris [13]. The AFofL wished to emphasize in this way that the workers' claims were legitimized by the political philosophy of American republicanism, and could be pursued within those spaces left open to the working classes by United States democracy. At the very moment when Gompers was calling for solidarity and international involvement with the working-class and socialist community of Europe, the objective of the 8-hour day was rapidly assuming, at least in the United States, strictly national characteristics.

Was this strategy of the AFofL, aimed principally at the American public, perceived, understood, interpreted, accepted or opposed by the forces of power — cultural, financial or political — within the Italian colonies? What aspects of American ideology were grasped by our immigrants, and in what manner? If the demand for an 8-hour working day could have direct impact on the immigrants, it cannot be said that an appeal to American rights found them equally sensitive, especially in view of the fact that the social and productive world of the ethnic communities was very poorly sheltered by the umbrella of United States democratic republicanism.

The «Americanizing» project of the AFofL was not accepted by the KofL, which refused the new trade union's invitation to participate in the preparations for the 1890 May Day, deeming such manifestations — in the word of their Secretary Terence Powderly — subversive and unAmerican [14]. Thus the first appointment to celebrate May Day in the United States, although organized by the AFofL and by

Socialists like McGuire, became a further dividing element in the labor movement.

The Italian community of New York also had mixed feelings about these workers' manifestations, at least judging by its newspapers. The oldest of these, *L'Eco d'Italia*, after an initial endorsement of the workers' demands on the basis of the American freedoms in 1886, changed opinion immediately after the Haymarket events, joining the anti-radical and anti-labor campaign of the American newspapers, stigmatizing the «unruly laborers» and calling their requests «always more excessive» [15]. In subsequent years *l'Eco* was to pay little attention to the world of labor and to give little coverage to news of May Day.

The editorial policy of the colony's second newspaper, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, founded in 1880, was more sympathetic toward labor problems. In 1891, in speaking of preparations for May Day in Italy, no censorious tone was used, and a Mazzinian accord between capital and labor was advocated. Ultimately, during May Day of 1890 the workers had shown themselves to be «calm, peaceable, satisfied merely to make their presence felt», to form a «good and ingenuous» sector of the people. This being so, May Day had become according to *Il Progresso*, «a popular expression so solemn that all men of thought and feeling must respect it». The only art of government needed was that of «non-interference» in what were for the people its «great days». It was instead necessary to take inexorable action, added the newspaper in an article pubblished a few days later, when the «good and generous» mass of workers became infiltrated by those who, having nothing in common with them, «aimed at creating grave material disorder». The news published by the Associated Press on the behavior of the anarchists in Italy during the May Day celebrations of that year demonstrated, according to *Il Progresso*, that this «evil tendency» could find fertile soil in such occasions. And it concluded «increasing firmness is needed to maintain the old order» (but what order was intended, the Italian or the American one, was not made clear) «expressly for the purpose of rendering freedom even more beneficial» [16].

The concerned notes on the 1891 Italian events were accompanied by comments on May Day in the United States. Here a contrast was provided, according to *Il Progresso*, by the festive atmophere of the day, the participation of «numerous workers' associations» and the unofficial blessing of some employers in zones where the day was

recognized by now «as a general holiday» on which the workers were allowed «to suspend labor» and to organize highy popular evening manifestations. In that year Italian Branch n. 15, of the Cloakmakers Union n. 1 held a meeting «for all Italians» at «the usual place at 114 Bleeker Street to make arrangements for the May Day parade». When the festivities were over, a worker who defined himself as a «mechanic» thanked the newspaper, also on behalf of «other working companions» for the news it had reported on May Day «here and on the other side of the Atlantic», adding that he «had read it attentively and enjoyed it very much» [17]. Still in 1893, while reporting no specific information on initiatives of Ialian workers in New York, *Il Progresso* exhorted its readers on the occasion of May Day not to forget that «poverty and want» persisted. It then described the ojectives set by workers' associations in Italy for the May Day demostrations, reported on difficulties encountered by the French associations of workers at the service of the State, and spoke lastly of the great preparatory meetings held in New York and Brooklyn, praising their order and wide-scale participation [18].

From these few data it can be seen that the Italian workers in the United States felt a certain interest in May Day. It would be important to find out precisely how this interest was expressed — through, for example, comparison with American trade-union sources and journalistic and consular reports — and how it was channeled and perceived by those who were in the process of becoming the leaders of the Italian colony, as well as by the various sectors of American society.

On the other hand, it was expressly at this time that the AFofL began to pay less attention to May Day, concentrating its forces instead on the demand for more precise legislation regarding working hours and on the proposal to institute Labor Day through Federal legislation. On the institutional level there was a recomposition of the American labor movement, at least as regards these two objectives. The KofL and the AFofL presented together petitions to congress on this matter [19]. If legislation on working hours remained a difficult goal to achieve, the labor movement had greater success with the second request. The decree that instituted Labor Day was signed in 1894 by President Cleveland, the man who had authorized calling out the Federal troops against the Pullman strikers. Proposed by the socialist McGuire, demanded by the workers, Labor Day now became an instrument for integration of the working classes as such into American society, a symbol of their acceptance of the rules of the

political and social game under the banner of American democratic republicanism. In this context, May Day became stripped of references to American values, remaining linked instead to the memory of strikes and bombings, surrounded by that aura of estrangement from the American world which a certain sector of the press and the KofL leaders had tried so hard to create around it, and which had been further confirmed by the Congress of the II Socialist International of 1891. The American Socialist Party, instead, often present at the Congresses of the II International, spoke out in favor of the May Day celebrations, deeming Labor Day worthy of little consideration. A further cause for friction was thus added to the relations between the SLP and the American organized labour movement, relations which had been tense since 1890 [20].

Between 1890 and the end of the century, May 1st became radicalized and Labor Day became Americanized in the United States. It was within this context that the socialists among the Italians in America were able, through the establishment in 1897 of the newspaper *Il Proletario*, to create a network of relationships, albeit a fragile one, with the American world of the SLP and with the Italian colonies [21]. But to manuever skillfully both as Italian Socialists adherent to International Socialism and as Workers in America involved serious problems.

In the now socialist holiday of May 1st the Italians in North America, socialist or not, participated as well as they could. Proof of this is found not only by the reports of the celebrations held on May Day, published in *Il Proletario* in the May issues starting from 1899, but also in the much scarcer news — although more significant, considering that the source is conservative in nature — printed by such papers as *Il Corriere Italiano* of Buffalo, New York, starting from 1898 [22]. But even more indicative of the Italian immigrants' sensivity to May Day was the appeal launched by *L'Araldo*, a paper recently founded in New York and of confused political tendency, to the socialists on the occasion of the 1899 celebrations, promptly denounced by the latter. *L'Araldo* offered to put at the disposal of the Italian socialists four pages of its special May 1st edition and, on the following year, took the trouble to send a correspondent to the banquet held by the Italian Socialists of New Jersey to celebrate the occasion [23]. Why so much interest in the socialists? Why so much desire, on the part of conservative newspapers too,to keep the appointment with May Day? These are questions which, if answered, can help us to recover elements of the political debate going on at

that time in America's Italian communities.

But celebrating May Day in certain zones of the United States had become a risk, contrary to what *Il Progresso* had noted in 1893. Camillo Cianfarra, Editor-in-Chief of *Proletario* from 1899 to 1901, described the situation as follows: «The workers and socialists assembling for May Day were often subjected to the retaliation of the employers, who dismissed them from their jobs. The employer, whether American or Italian, did not allow socialists in his industry...» [24] The May Day recurrence could, moreover, create tensions within the radical Italian communities themselves. At times, friends and fellow workers of the Italian socialists were anarchists, who believed May Day should be celebrated by abstaining from work. This belief was not shared by both the SLP nor by the relatively new Socialist Party of America (SPA) with which the Italian socialists were affiliated. The two parties preferred to organize evening meetings at the local branch in living and Working conditions that could affect the mode of celebration. In some mining zones, for example, where actions were clearly identifiable, the fear of retaliation could keep everyone, even the radicals, at home. In other cases, working-class and ethnic solidarity could result in participation of almost all the inhabitants of a town in celebrations lasting throughout the day [25]. Once having resolved the difficulties, the Italian socialists held evening meetings at the headquarters of their American comrades or at those of the Italian cooperatives, met for drinks among friends at some barhall whose owner, if not necessarily a sympathizer, was at least obliging. The Italian Socialists managed to organize parades through the town with bands and flags, banquets, perhaps a recital written for the occasion by some local comrade who staged it with his entire family as actors, and dances that went on to the early morning hours [26].

Did the choice of ways of how to celebrate the holiday and the degree to which it took hold among the Italian workers depend more on the strength of their traditions, on the American context in which they were immersed or on the attitude toward socialism and the labor issue in the colonies in which they lived? To find the answer, local research is necessary. What is however clear on the basis of the present state of research is that the Italian socialists in the United States celebrated May Day in a wide variety of manners.

But at the turn of the century the purpose of the celebration seemed by now detached from the old demands for shorter working hours,

peace among the people of the world, international social legislation. The holiday had instead become an occasion for the diffusion of political education within the colony, by explaining for example the value of this holiday as contrasted with those promoted by the «prominenti», such as that of September 20th or the one for the Statute, or the patron saints' days. These other holidays honored, more or less directly, a monarchy, a nation or a religious belief which had for centuries contributed to the subjugation of the lower classes and — as was stressed by *Il Proletario* — exposed the Italians to the contempt of the Americans [27]. The 1st of May was also a pretext for intensifying propaganda. Special publications were prepared for distribution during the day, posters were put up in the streets, socialist lecturers made speech after speech. All of this, as well as the entertainments, favored more energetic collection of funds, always scarce. Festivals, moreover, served to draw the entire colony together. Non-Socialist friends, Italians from neighboring zones were also invited. In the same spirit the Italian Socialists tried to involve French, German, American comrades in their celebrations. Their invitations were reciprocated, thus reuniting, though only briefly, a labor movement that seemed irrevocably divided along ethnic lines [28].

May Day was utilized almost as if it were the New Years' Eve of the socialists rather than their Easter, for summing up accounts, and for celebrating the progress of socialism among the Italians of America. The holiday became the occasion for officially announcing the purchase of a bar-room by the cooperative *Il Proletariato* at Paterson, for publishing a photograph of the two-storey Socialist Hall headquarters built by the Italian Socialists of Barre, Vermont, or for announcing with pride that *Il Proletario*, after many difficulties, was now firmly rooted in the Italian colony [29].

Like New Years' Eve, May Day was a moment for re-evoking emotional and ideological ties of significance to the Italian socialists in the United States. Articles by the Italian Socialist representatives of the various tendencies within the party in Italy, and whose ideas or political positions served as inspiration to the Italian-American branches, were published. At times the portraits of these men also appeared in special May Day issues. To his «friend Cianfarra» who had requested it, the former Editor-in-chief of the *Proletario*, Giusto Calvi, sent from Italy three sonnets to be published in the special May Day edition of 1901. Such exchanges also crossed the ocean in the other direction. The poem written by Dr. Simplicio Righi, a resident of New

York, expressly for that edition, was subsequently reprinted in *Il Lavoratore* of Trieste. And a Tyrolean worker, fresh from his American experience, contributed to introducing the holiday into his home-town of Tesero where on May 1st, 1907, the day's events concluded with a discussion of the political and social situation in the United States [30]. May Day was thus transformed into a vehicle for exchanging information and perceptions on the experience of emigration, on life in foreign lands, on the greater or lesser possibilities for the development of socialism in places and conditions other than those of Italy.

With the passage of time it became clear, however, that the labor movement organized in the United States was no longer mobilizing on the occasion of May Day, but on Labor Day instead. Especially in places where the American Socialist parties were not present, Labor Day came to be the only date on which the American working class celebrated itself, took hold of cities with parades and posters. For the Italian radicals, this dichotomy created problems. The anarchists' attitude toward this all-American holiday was one of contemptuous rejection, but the socialists found themeselves in a more contradictory situation, since the position of the American Socialists was in itself contradictory. While the SLP was opposed to celebrating Labor Day, Debs' SPA participated in the festivities, if not as an official Party, certainly through its members, who were also members of the trade unions affiliated with the AFofL [31].

In this context, both *Il Proletario* and *L'Avanti* — a newspaper which was for some years published by Italian socialists of the SPA — decided to explain the motivations, specify the aims and, at times, to actively support the holiday. But Labor Day was soon to be adopted by the non-working class sector of the Italian colony, as demonstrated by the announcements of Labor Day picnics to be held organized by the newspaper of the so-called «prominenti», and articles dedicated to this holiday in the same papers [32].

What did the Italian Socialists feel in celebrating a holiday so dear to the guest nation and to its labor movement, side-by-side with those «prominenti» against whom they could no longer inveigh, at least on that occasion? How did the Italian workers comprehend these two holidays, May Day and Labor Day, outwardly so similar but loaded with such different significance? In particular, as regards those workers who, being neither politicized nor able to procure direct information due to lack of time, inability to read Italian or English, strong con-

1° MAGGIO

75

Milano, 26 aprile 1891. — Numero unico. Cent. 5.

Sommario

Senza firme

UN TENTATIVO DI PROFEZIE

FESTA OPERAJA DEL LAVORO

Ai Lavoratori d'Italia — Operai! Operaje!

Il giorno 1° di maggio è destinato a portare nel mondo la notizia che la classe lavoratrice si è avvezza nel diritto da conquistare.

Attraverso i mari, attraverso i monti, questo pensiero ci affratella tutti, uomini e donne che vivono del lavoro e siamo disposti, per mostrare la solidarietà universale che regna fra di noi nella lotta che dobbiamo sostenere contro i nemici della nostra emancipazione — solidarietà che non conosce confini né frontiere, perchè la causa del lavoro non è causa di privilegio né di classe, ma è la causa della eguaglianza e della giustizia. Una conquista, che sul momento in cui ci troviamo crediamo utile e necessaria a rialzare le condizioni della nostra classe è la RIDUZIONE DELLA GIORNATA A 8 ORE, senza riduzione di salario per chi, con esse:

1. Sarà finalmente l'assenteismo. Tutti operai lavoreranno. La concorrenza fra essi sarà diminuita, e sarà limitato il ribasso dei salari che ne è conseguenza;
2. Sarà diminuito l'ingombro dei mercati e la mancanza di consumo;
3. I lavoratori avranno 8 ore di lavoro, 8 ore di riposo nella, vita di vita, di libertà, di istruzione;
4. Le famiglie operaie avranno tempo di pensare all'educazione, agli affetti, all'igiene, e tutto quanto rende la vita civile e confortevole.

Perciò vi invitiamo a questo plebiscito universale, nel quale la nostra classe intende affermare la sua volontà che il lavoro non sia più un arbitrio dei proprietari della ricchezza — la sua forza per rivendicare la questione economica a beneficio di tutti — la sua coscienza nell'avvenire di emancipazione che deve ridestare il mondo dalla più obbrobriosa delle schiavitù.

Lavoratori d'Italia!

Per dimostrare tutto ciò vi invitiamo a fare del 1° maggio un giorno di festa, di vacanza, di riposo: sottraete la domenica alla fatica quotidiana, abituate le menti al suo benefico, religioso riposo che ci ricorda: INDIETREGGIATE TUTTI DAL LAVORO; nel quale oggi sta scritta, lavata dal nostro sudore la nostra condanna alla abbrutimento e alla miseria.

Operai di città e di campagna!

Nella nostra classe, che è la più maggioranza dell'umanità, stanno le forze vive del genere umano, il nostro progresso, il nostro [illegible] il nostro avvenire [illegible] di tutta la vita sociale: — [illegible]

15703

Seconda edizione. — La prima, sequestrata.

1° MAGGIO

Pubblicazione del Comitato Esecutivo eletto dalle Associazioni popolari milanesi per la manifestazione del 1° Maggio 1892 in Milano e Provincia

Numero Unico) **Si vende in tutta Italia a Cent. 5** (Numero Unico)

SEDE DEL COMITATO ESECUTIVO - MILANO, VIA UNIONE, 30, PRESSO IL SINDACATO LAVORANTI CALZOLAI.

Ai Lettori

Sciopero

riesce ad arrestare il grande cammino che le nostre idee percorrono in mezzo allo spirito pubblico.

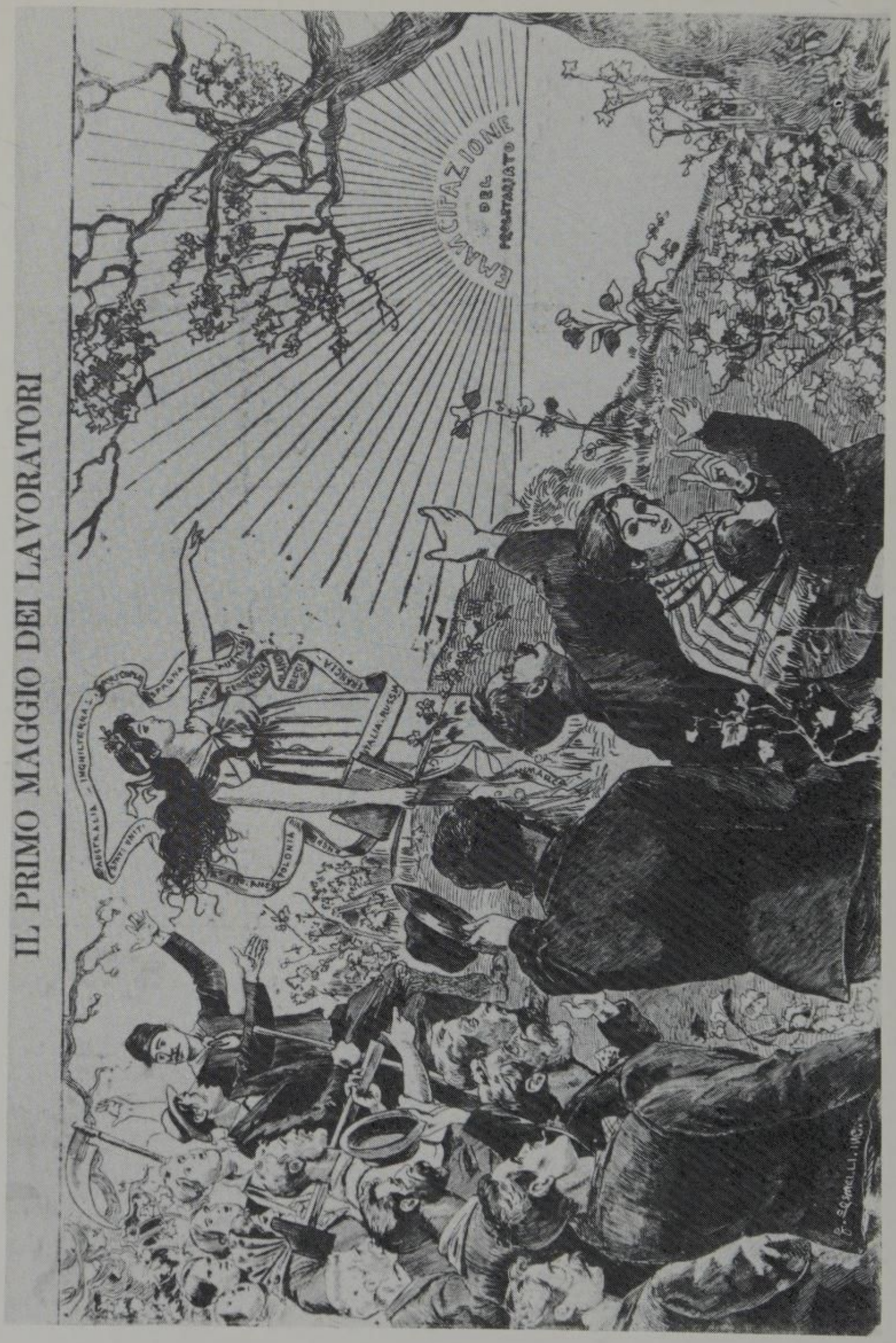
Impedita e soffocata la propaganda pubblica e orale che istruisce la massa del popolo, esso che non ha ancora acquistato la coscienza della sua forza deve sfogare il suo risentimento, respingere la provocazione, e per mezzo della stampa a mettere le sue idee in pubblico [illegible] questa possa ad [illegible] diverso le sue [illegible] qui ho pre- [illegible] e, tutta la [illegible] ria perchè [illegible] alità e qui [illegible] senza impazienza, ma forte, calmo, inesorabile il nostro principio di emancipazione lo difenderemo per [illegible]

1. Vespasiano Bignami, *1° Maggio*, 1891.
2. Arturo Taddio, *1° Maggio*, 1892.

3. Luigi Conconi, *Redenzione*, 1894.

I. MAGGIO 1892
109
La montagna fatale
La montagna, che il dio della vendetta
Estrusse qui di rocce immani e gialle,
Di nuvole perenni atra ha la vetta,
Di mostruosi boschi irte le spalle.
Doppia una mole, incontro agli astri eretta,
Nereggia a un lato solitaria, e dalle
Viscere [illegible] vasto saetta
Fredde ombre e morte all'escarpata valle.
Coronati fantasmi, idoli strani
Vegliano in tiestee mense, dall'alto
Ghignando a' travagliosi argenti umani.
Mentre, chiuso a' terrori il cor di smalto,
Un paziente popolo di nani,
Schierasi del fatal monte all'assalto.
M. RAPISARDI.

4. Rodolfo Paoletti, *Allegorical Composition*, 1892.



5. Gabriele Galantara, *Primo Maggio dei Lavoratori*, 1894.

Mantova, 1.° Maggio 1898.

SUPPLEMENTO AL N. 1
del Giornale LA TERRA

L' APPARIZIONE DELLA « TERRA »

la terra è morta
1- Calmatevi, signor prefetto, la terra è morta e nessuno sopravvivrà.
2- Essa sarà l'ultimo trionfo dei lavoratori che soffrono ed attendono una nuova era di giustizia e di libertà.
3- Quando il movimento meccanico e vegetativo dei nostri sistemi, che, esposti al loro calore, dovranno bruciare, farsi e sparire.
4- I poveri pianeti sfranti della donna, ragazza, sperduti di ghiaccio, morti nell'immenso, privi di ogni vitalità.
5- Gli ultimi avanzi della costellazione umana, funerali mummificati di sangue e di fango, erranti nello spazio in attesa che passino le nubi che hanno oscurato il loro astro maggiore.
6- Le nebulose cercano di oscurare la luce del sole
7- I piccoli satelliti che volano allegramente intorno al matrimonio astro che non ha più alcuna forza di attrazione.
8- Gli avanzi fossili del nostro astro formato che si raccolgono sotto cavi per fare pompa di appetiti memorie preistoriche e per ispirare
9- L'astro di corpi getterà fasci di luce mangue e smisurata. I denari pubblici allora, l'ombra della Terra possibilità, un certo capi produrre delle eclissi.
10- Badate, signor prefetto, non la tocchi. Il nostro pianeta è di natura volcanica: e può esplodere che come, trasportato, possiamo di nuovo urtare contro di
Badate, prefetto, signore, non la tocchi
11- La terra deve compiere il suo moto di rivoluzione intorno al sole.

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DOPO IL 1° MAGGIO

ELLO splendore di un pomeriggio primaverile, fra i crescenti ardori del palpitante maggio, il grasso ese sedendo in ricco landau, si recava a pas- lungo i superbi e ombrosi viali che circon- o i privilegiati quartieri della borghesia, nei mai si ode il tumultuoso fragore delle officine, gna solenne il silenzio a tutela dei dolci ozi adroni del mondo, dei detentori del capitale. al ciglio di un viale, assiso sovra un macigno mentato dai raggi cocenti del sole, un operaio, solamente dei suoi muscoli e della coscienza voro per apprestare il pane all'adorata fami- col ferreo martello infrangeva quella ghiaia nell' inverno futuro sarebbe stata necessaria a mantenere in giusto livello, e ben levigato il piano del signorile passeggio.

Il borghese annoiato e alquanto nervoso per le contrazioni dello stomaco ancora incapace a smaltire il soverchio cibo, guardando con occhio di compatimento il frangitore di sassi ordinò al cocchiere di soffermarsi e rivolto al modesto lavoratore con motto beffardo gli chiese notizie di sua salute.

Ottima rispose l'altro: forte il braccio e gagliardo l'appetito.

Cui il borghese crucciato soggiunse: E la festa del 1° maggio è passata, e chi sa quante ne passeranno e tu e i tuoi compagni restate sempre poveri!

« Ma non per noi, replicò sollecito il lavoratore, ma per l' Idea, per i nostri figliuoli, per l futura io e i miei compagni combattiamo.

La via è lunga, aspra e difficile e pien coli: ma la via resta bene conosciuta da tariato e gli ostacoli esso infrange e sch riduce in polvere come faccio io di qu sassi.

E come io avrò terminata quest'opera q e sul cumulo della ghiaia nell'ora vesp conficchero sopra il badile ed il marte l'Umanità trionfante, nell'ora crepuscol borghesia, sugli atterrati ostacoli di que dire sui vigenti sistemi politico-economi ciali ridotti ad un cumulo di rovine, inalze sillo della *Giustizia* e della *Libertà*.

Dr. Mo

Una tremenda falsità

I ZESSIZORI

Ei ci ha spremuto infin l'ultimo gocci
Or come cani mitraglian ci fa.

10. G. Vannucci, *Dopo il 1° Maggio*, 1909.

trol exerted by their employers, were able to interpret the purport, the meaning and the degree of social acceptance of this holiday only from its external manifestations?

If we can manage to find an answer to the questions that have gradually emerged in this brief initial investigation of May Day among the Italian immigrants to the United States, we will have added new elements to our knowledge of the process of formation of a political and social identity of the Italians in America. And by following the faint reflections of these May Day holidays which reached Italy from the United States, we can also add elements to that image of America, not yet sufficiently studied [33], that was being slowly formulated by some sectors of Italian radicalism.

Elisabetta Vezzosi

Memory, Struggle and Americanization: the May Day of the Italian Socialists and Revolutionary Syndicalists in America in the 1910's

In referring to the years around the turn of the century, Maurizio Antonioli states that May Day represented for the workers «the reappropriation of a collective identity, beyond national barriers, ideological fences, corporative urging, and the disintegrating forces of daily life» [34].

If this was true for a majority of the workers who recognized this date as theirs, the statement becomes loaded with significance for the Italian immigrants to America. For them «the disintegrating forces of daily life», deriving from impact with the social and industrial reality of America, were often explosive.

Starting from the early years of the 20th century, «radical communities» began to take shape, within the broader Italian-American colonies. The reference points of these communities were the Anarchists groups, the Italian Socialists Federation founded in 1902 since 1911 adhering to the revolutionary syndicalist tactics of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and the Italian Federation of the Socialist Party of America created in 1910, of «reformist» character [35]. For the workers who were part of these «radical com-

unities» May Day was to acquire, far beyond its original May Day significance, at least a threefold meaning. It became a «memorial» to a radical past in Italy and thus a reaffirmation of the radical immigrants militant roots; a form of «resistance» to that American society which saw, in the holiday of the immigrants — whether dedicated to labor or not — a threat to the established order; and it became a demand for recognition of those democratic freedoms that the American Constitution seemed to guarantee.

These and many others were the meanings attributed by the radical Italians to the «American» May Day. The events of the moment would then alter the objectives and significance of the holiday on various occasions, with May Day becoming a day of festival, or of struggle, or of both at the same time. A meeting point for the internationalist tensions, May Day was frequently celebrated in common by the various radical groups which, temporarily abandoning their different tactics and strategies, marched side-by-side. This temporary «unity» meant, at least for the Italian revolutionary Syndicalists, a guarantee of maintenance of the continuing revolutionary aspect of May Day. In 1912 their newspaper, *Il Proletario* stated that it was necessary to reaffirm the holiday's aspect of general strike at the very moment when, in America, the attempt was being made to nullify this meaning by having the day coincide with Sunday [36].

May Day articles published in the Italian-American radical press expounded the traditional theme of awakening and resurrection, and of the «workers Easter». Once again May Day was a holiday, a «different» space in social life, but it was also a moment of struggle, in which hopes for a better future seemed to take shape. As socialist leader Giuseppe Bertelli wrote in 1908: «Comrades! May Day is the apotheosis of a future to be created, make it soon become the commemoration of a past destroyed by you» [37].

In symbolic expression, the May Day of the Italian radicals in America did not stray far from the classic models established by the working classes in Europe, and in Italy in particular.

In the early years of the 20th century, the «American» May Day represented for the Italian socialists in Italy, a choice example of what went beyond commemoration and symbolic expression. A socialist pamphlet published in Genova spoke out in praise of the «pragmatism» of the «American» May Day, based on a program «limited and precise and... rewarded with excellent practical results» [38]. The pamphlet expressed the hope that also in Italy it

would assume that character, would «sanction the struggles sustained each year, be an excellent means of propaganda and organization» [39].

The idealized view of some Italian workers as to the strength of the «American» May Day was soon dissipated in the immigrants mind. It was in fact immediately clear that, for the American proletariat, the day to be celebrated was the first Monday in September, Labor Day, a date set by mutual agreement between industrialists and conservative trade-union leaders. Already in 1912 the immigrant Italian socialists had stigmatized this day of harmony between social classes as «choreographic buffoonery» [40]. It was thus inevitable that the memory should turn, throughout the entire decade of the 1910s, to the militant May Day vividly experienced in Italy. As Giuseppe Bertelli wrote, referring to the 1893 May Day at Empoli, celebrated under the reigning Crispinian reaction: «Today from the banks of the Michigan, it is dear to us on this day, sacred to the hopes of the future, to speak of our comrades of former times and of events of the past» [41]. With the same nostalgia Gioacchino Artoni, another of the Italian socialist leaders in America and at the time a miner in Pittsburgh, Pa., explaining to his children in 1910 the meaning of May Day, lamented the American workers' lack of interest in that date. In contrast, Artoni praised the attitude of the Italian workers and of socialist leaders as Prampolini who had conferred on that day, beyond the phenomenon of parade and commemoration, the value of emancipation «from subjugation to capital» [42]. While Italian immigrant socialists and revolutionary syndindacalists were organizing balls to be held in the local party headquarters, picnics and country outings, for many years the dominant note in their press on occasion of May Day was that of nostalgia for a holiday that in Europe, in Italy, was identified as a day of struggle. In America, on the contrary, the day seemed to have lost its revolutionary charge, its deeper significance.

Celebrating May Day in America was not, moreover, easy for the Italian immigrants, who often met with hostility from the Italian-American colony of which they were a part, and with prohibitions established by the public authorities and urged by the industrialists. The holiday of the immigrants, whether that of May Day or of the patron saint, assumed a «subversive» character in relation to the programs and the order of American society proper.

In Jessup, Pa., a mining village away in the valley of Lackawan-

na County, the first local Italian socialist branch was formed in early 1906. In the years of its flourishing, the group grew around a nucleus of Umbrian immigrants, coming mainly from the town of Gubbio, marked by the vivid experience of peasants' struggles. In addition to the local socialist branch, a «Casa del Popolo» was also founded, which in 1910 counted among its members about sixty Umbrians, not only from Gubbio but also from Gualdo Tadino, Nocera Umbra and Sigillo [43]. In Jessup the Italian community thus came to be identified with the Umbrian one and in 1908 the «corsa dei ceri» (a race holding huge candles) which on May 15 takes place at Gubbio was recreated on American soil. But celebrating this festival was, for the «American» Eugubini a difficult matter. The mining companies were opposed to the celebration since they were unwilling to grant the immigrants' time off for the celebration. The holiday was thus transformed into a moment of struggle between Italian immigrants and the mining companies [44].

Two years later, in 1910, the municipal authorities prohibited public celebration of May Day. The local branch of the Italian Socialists replied by abstaining from work, organizing a great parade and a conference for the following day. The Mayor of the city was reluctantly forced to give his permission for the manifestation. On May 2nd, a great parade marched through the streets of Jessup to the sound of music, headed by women and children dressed in red [45]. Alberico Molinari, socialist leader and author of the commemorative play *The Chicago martyrs* [46] held a political rally there.

Claiming the right to celebrate a holiday, be it their traditional hometown festival or the celebration of labor, touched on the Italian immigrants' deeply-felt problem of identity, and thus of «resistance» to a society which, was trying to press them into an American mould. For the mining companies the complaint of time wasted from work was evidently just a pretext. Roy Rosenzweig, «The middle and upper classes... perceived at least some forms of working class recreation as a challenge to the dominant culture, to family and factory, to patriotism and property» [47]. As regard the immigrants, this was true to an even greater degree. They could of course participate in holidays, but only when these were «American» ones, when marching in a parade meant bathing in the waters of Americanism. The 4th of July thus became «Americanization Day». All holidays which instead emphasized «otherness» were either prohibited or in some way obstructed. In this context, the Italian Socialist branch of Jessup had

to struggle to celebrate the «corsa dei ceri» no less than to celebrate May Day. If, as Eric Hobsbawm states, the Italians tended «to be unusually sensitive to the power of symbol and cerimony» [48], for the Italian immigrants to America, the May Day like other festivals linked to Italian traditions, was identified with the rupture of an «imposed organization» of time [49] which in America, more strongly than in Italy, was dominating the rhythms of work and life of the laboring classes. In this sense the holiday became, as Giulia Calvi has pointed out, a form of resistance to industrial discipline through refusal to work and absenteeism in the factory [50].

For the Italian radicals, May Day was also the occasion for demonstrating that, as far as propaganda and organization were concerned, they were second to none of the immigrant comrades of other nationalities. The holiday could even become a tool of propaganda expressly directed at the «American proletariat», to convince it — in the words of an Italian-American Socialist at the start of the century — «that it holds common cause with the expropriates of other nations», to induce it to diverse itself of its «presumptiousness» [51]. In the immediate Postwar period instead, May Day became the moment for energetic protest against an extensive period of violent anti-worker reaction, which affected the immigrant laborers in the first person [52].

In the United States, the end of World War I saw a reassessment of May Day as a moment for exaltation of world peace, in contrast to the false concept of fatherland, and to European and American «imperialism». A socialist pamphlet published in Italy in 1919 states that, thanks to the war, «the imperialism of the Kaiser's defunct empire» has passed down «in unseemly heredity to republican France, to democratic England, to free America» [53].

In 1919 the revolutionary syndicalists of the Italian Socialist Federation published on the occasion of May Day a single issue, «Risorgimento» [54], in which the soon-to-come revolution in Italy was heralded, and the American government was accused of atrocious misdeeds and unjust imprisonments, Czarist behavior in that America which should have been the land of democracy, freedom and civilization. Lastly, it called for liberation of the Socialist leader Eugene Debs, imprisoned for his opposition to the war.

If the syndicalists were looking in the direction of Italy, for the Italian «reformist» socialists of the SPA May Day of 1919 was to represent the «resurrection» of proletarian unity and of the Socialist

parties destroyed by the war, in the name of a new life inspired by Socialist concepts. The theme of renewal and of reconstruction implicit in May Day was thus returning once again, even more strongly motivated by the recent massacre in Europe. According to their official newspaper, *L'Avanti!*, much work of purification still had to be done within the ranks of the Socialist parties before the Socialist International could form again. However in that year the paper stated that May Day, in «greeting a Russia neither vanquished nor tamed, but strong and more alive and more aggressive than ever.... and calling out into the public square, into all the public squares, the rebels of thousands of idioms, solemnly sanctions socialist reconstruction in spirit, pompously announces the soon-to come reconstruction in fact. Such certainty, such faith has been transformed into us by the May Day of 1919» [55].

Never as in that year did the American proletariat participate in May Day. There were bloody uprisings and prohibited demonstrations. The Italian radical immigrants too, came out in force to participate. At Lawrence, Mass., where a wide-scale textile workers' strike was in progress [56], May Day was the occasion for a great demonstration of strikers and non-strikers. Picketers marched, adorned with carnations and other red flowers. Italians and strikers of other ethnic groups «adorned their windows with balloons, and that evening there was a magnificent spectacle of Venetian lights» [57]. The middle class Italian-Americans sympathized, and the many closed shops included all of those owned by Italian shopkeepers. In the political rallys held alongside those of the French-Belgians, the Germans, Russians, Lithuanians and Poles, it was demanded that Debs be freed and that Allied «brigandage» against the Russia of the Soviets came to an end.

In 1920, May Day was greeted with equal triumph by *L'Avanti!*. «The dawn of May Day 1920 finds half of Europe resting on the bases of socialist republics and the other half more than ready to dethrone the domineering autocrats and very near to imitating the Russian proletariat» [58].

For the Italian immigrants of the SPA, May Day of 1920 was a hard day of struggle in that America where men were not allowed to express their thoughts, meetings were broken up, where «our companions who were elected by the will of the people to the offices of public power have been driven away and expelled by the capitalist gangs, and others are still in detention, moaning in the lurid jails of the democratic republic of Uncle Sam» [59]. In that same 1920 in

which the American republic was so severely critized and judged «antidemocratic», the immigrant Italian socialists, clearly marked by powerful contradictions, still appealed to the fathers of the republic and to the rights sanctioned by the Constitution for restoration of the lost freedoms. For years the first page of their newspaper had declaimed the words of Lincoln's inaugural address: «This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing government, they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it or their revolutionary right to dismember or overthrow it» [60]. They therefore joined their comrades of the SPA when the latter proposed that amnesty for political prisoners be requested on February 23rd, the anniversary of the birth of Washington [61].

The Italian socialists in America, now persuaded of the justness of conquering public powers, became themselves deeply involved in the process of Americanization taking place in the nation. They were rediscovering the internationalist May Day simultaneously to the process of integration which brought them to appeal to the democratic America of the early 19th century and to the rights guaranteed by the Constitution. In contrast, the revolutionary syndicalists linked to the IWW, profoundly foreign to the American political reality, disillusioned as to the fighting spirit of the proletariat in the nation in which they lived, turned increasingly toward Italy. Greeting the so called «occupation of the factories» as the first step in the imminent socialist revolution, they increasingly embraced the concept of May Day as an affirmation of a revolutionary general strike.

In the May Day manifestations, parades and political rallies, socialists and revolutionary syndicalists marched side-by-side. It was the example of the October Revolution which was to unite the former, increasingly becoming an organic part of the American scene, and the latter, increasingly linked to Italy, in celebration of the «American» May Days of the early 1920s.

In an incessant dialectic between holiday and mass mobilization, between the «recreational» significance of social aggregation and the demand — dictated by contingent events — for the restoration of lost freedoms, the May Day of the Italian Socialists in America, no matter how strongly tied to the memory of its meaning in the homeland, now formed part of a world of values that was to become increasingly «American».

Translated by Catherine Frost

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17 *Il Progresso Italo-Americano, April 29, May 2 and 3, 1891.*

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19 *U.S Congress, Senate Miscellaneous Documents, 209 (52-2), Washington, 1892.*

20 P. Foner, *History*, vol. II, p. 287. According to Mario De Ciampis, to old-time Italian socialist militants in America, Labor Day « was a concession granted by the Congress of the United States to lure the workers away from the socialist May Day ». Mario De Ciampis, *Storia de Il Proletario*, manuscript, file 75, p. 302, Manuscript, Collection, Immigration History Research Center, St. Paul, M.N.. The position of the SLP is well represented by the opening drawings of *The People* for May Day of 1899 and for Labor Day of 1902. In the first of these, in floral style, a young woman of regal bearing is walking among fruit trees, at her shoulders a wide ribbon enscribed with the words « equality », « freedom », offers to men and women, who are human derelicts at her feet and each in an individual attitude of yearning and awaiting, the fruit that she has apparently just picked. Below this scene, almost as a result of the preceding action, men and women, freed from bondage and exhibiting the distinctive signs of different ethnic groups in their clothing and head dress, are linked to one another by a banner of which each holds an edge, bearing the word « unity ». In the background are trees, perhaps from the same forest as that of the upper drawing. This representation of May Day occupied the entire page, evoking harmony, an aesthetic significance to life, and almost verging on affectedness. The drawing published on September 1, 1902 was very different. Though signed by the same artist, Armer — perhaps a pseudonym — the lines are harsh, the base of the drawing recalls an anvil and within the circle above it is the personification of Labor who, wearing a crown, relaxes on a throne which Capital, also depicted wearing a crown, has temporarily granted him. Capital is represented submissively bowing to Labor on the throne, but hiding behind his back chains bearing the words « for tomorrow ». Under the drawing is the explanation of all this: « Festival of Labor granted by the grace of Capital ». And while the drawing for May Day is surrounded by a phrase of solemn, religious, rhythm: « And thy Captivity Shall be turned and thou shall gather Thee from all the Nations Whither Thou Hast Been Scattered », the other drawing bears a legend which is almost farcical in tone: « Shall Put on Paper Crown, And wrap himself around with royale robe Done up to imitate his Master's Gown. (I'm in the secret of the comedy) and call himself a king ».

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22 *Il Corriere di Buffalo*, May 7, 1898; May 5, 1899; June 15, 1901; April 30, 1904; April 29, 1905, April 28, 1906.

23 *Il Proletario*, April 13, 1899; May 12, 1900. The socialist newspaper speaks

thus of *L'Araldo* «it passed from the antimonarchist radical tendencies of Barberi to the more or less revolutionary socialism of Michele Robertucci... and then into the arms of Grullino... L'Araldo is in part responsible for all the misadventures that have befallen the Italian colony in New York...» *Il Proletario*, April 13, 1899.

24 Mario De Ciampis, manuscript, file 75, p. 306, *La Parola dei Socialisti*, May 1, 1908.

25 *L'Aurora*, April 27, May 4 and 11, June 1, 1901.
La Libertà, May 1, 1902.
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28 *The People*, April 13, May 7, 1899; April 15, 1900.
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30 *Il Proletario*, Simplicio Righi, «Gli Emigranti dell'Ideale», May 1, 1903; *Il lavoratore Italiano*, May 17, 1907.

31 *L'Avanti*, August 4, 20; Sept 3, 1904; *Il Proletario*, Sept 9, 1899; *La Plebe*, Sept 5, 1907; M.M. Kaplan, J.P. Williams, E. Kohn eds., *The Faith*, pp.171-172.

32 *Il Corriere Italiano*, Sept. 10, 1904; Sept. 2, 9, 1905; Sept. 1, 8, 1906.

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34 Maurizio Antonioli. Tra «festa del lavoro», e «sciopero operaio»: gli anarchici italiani e il Primo Maggio tra la fine dell'Ottocento e gli inizi del Novecento, *Ricerche Storiche*, XIV, 2-3, May-December 1984, p. 538.

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37 *Il Primo Maggio della Parola dei Socialisti*, single issue I, 11-12, May 1, 1908.

38 *Il Primo Maggio. Il suo passato. Il suo avvenire*, Geneva, L. Bertoni, 1902, p. 29.

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40 Cf. G. Cannarso, Primo Maggio americano, *La Fiaccola*, IV, April 17, 27, 1912.

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43 Cf. Luciano Tosi, *L'emigrazione italiana all'estero in età giolittiana: il caso umbro*, Florence, Olsohki, 1983, pp. 95-98.

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45 Cf. s.f., « A Jessup, Pa. proibito festeggiare pubblicamente il 1° Maggio », *L'Ascesa del proletariato*, 33, May 15, 1910, and also « Jessup, Pa », *Ibid*, 34, May 15, 1910.

46 Cf. Alberico Molinari, *I martiri di Chicago*, Chicago, Ill., Italian Labor Publishing Bureau, 1909.

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49 M. Antonioli, Tra « festa del lavoro » e « sciopero operaio », p. 246.

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59 1° Maggio di realizzazione, *Ibid.*.

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